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THE LOCAL CHAPTER NETWORK (LCN): CHANGING THE FACE OF CONSCIOUSNESS WORLDWIDE

by Viki Atkinson

Viki Atkinson holds a BS in dance education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has recently been accepted to the MA in English/writing and rhetoric program at Virginia Commonwealth University. She currently teaches dance at Appomattox Regional Governor's School for the Arts and Technology and works as a freelance writer and editor. A former professional dancer/choreographer, she has taught dance extensively in public school, private studio, and college settings, and from 1987 to 1999 she served as senior dance critic for Spectator Magazine in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since June 2009, Viki has brought her writing and editing skills to the leadership council for the TMI Local Chapter Network. She attended her first EXCURSION workshop in 1992, attended the GATEWAY VOYAGE® in 2002, and hopes to return for a graduate program soon. Viki is a Reiki master and has recently renewed her interest in exploring other energy healing methods. In her free time, Viki enjoys reading, gardening, renovating her cozy bungalow in Richmond, Virginia, and playing with her border collie mix, Darcey.

One day in 2007, Laura Davis asked the members of her Silver Spring, Maryland, book group if they would like to try a Hemi-Sync® CD.

"I'll never forget the first time we spread out across my home—in beds, on couches, on rugs, and on yoga mats. As my friends donned their headphones and took their first trip to Focus 10, I envisioned little groups of Hemi-Sync-ers spreading out across the globe."

In 2008, when Paul Rademacher interviewed for the position of executive director at The Monroe Institute®, he proposed that the Institute find a way to connect with its graduates beyond the residential program experience. Once in his new role, he set the wheels in motion by traveling across the country to meet with thirty-five gatherings of TMI program graduates.

Rademacher's cross-country travels had a twofold purpose. One goal was to connect with program graduates and get their thoughts about the future of TMI. "I took copious notes about their responses," says Rademacher, "and this became vital information for the board of directors to evaluate our mission and vision."

The other reason for "going out" was to gauge interest in creating local chapters of The Monroe Institute. Rademacher felt that if there was enough interest, the local chapters could become a vital component in creating an enduring network of communities that would support TMI grads in continuing their spiritual journeys after leaving the Institute.

A number of groups of TMI graduates were already meeting regularly. Allison Moore, for example, had been inviting TMI grads to her home on Saturday evenings for several years. “I started the group in September 2005 as a birthday present to myself because I needed the contact and community with TMI people,” she explains.

Others were inspired to organize by Rademacher’s visits. In Naples, Florida, a group consisting of TMI grads and others who had expressed an interest in TMI programs met to hear Paul’s ideas about an international web of consciousness, and nine of the attendees took those ideas and ran with them. They began holding meetings almost immediately and have been meeting monthly ever since.

During the course of his travels, Rademacher met Laura Davis, and they shared their ideas for a global network of TMI grads. Conversations between the two ultimately led to Laura’s agreeing to take charge of the project.

First on the agenda was scheduling a weekend retreat for the purpose of bringing together interested people to get the network off the ground. The retreat was announced on the TMI Web site and in the newsletter, and all who were interested were invited to attend. The response was overwhelming, and, in the end, around twenty participants arrived at the Nancy Penn Center in June 2009 to start brainstorming about what the TMI Local Chapter Network would look like.

Although it was assumed that Laura would continue to shepherd the effort after the retreat, her intuition led her to step back and allow others to lend their talents to carrying the project forward. A leadership team was put in place during the weekend, and Allyn Evans accepted the leadership role that Laura had previously held. Evans was joined by me, Shaye Hudson, and Jack Slate (cochair). Later, due to a change in work responsibilities, Slate stepped down, and Pamela Boyer was asked to join the organizing efforts. As additional needs were identified during the following year, more people were brought on board; the current LCN leadership council now includes Andrea Berger and Candie Sanderson, one of the founders of the Naples Local Chapter.

Through e-mails and regular conference calls, the group created an organizational structure, a mission, and guidelines for the Local Chapter Network, as well as a handbook to help local chapter leaders get started. Ten U.S. regions were designated, and a call went out for volunteers to serve as regional coordinators.

As the news spread about the Local Chapter Network, inquiries about how to find or start a local group began coming in almost faster than they could be answered. Candie Sanderson was charged with responding to the start-up inquiries and was able to offer the aspiring chapter leaders the benefit of her considerable expertise in helping to organize and run a

successful local chapter. Among those whom she helped were Don and Cindy Murphy in Amelia Island, Florida, and Scott Desgrosselliers in Chicago.

“Back in December 2009,” recalls Don Murphy of Dome Healing Center, “Jacquie Rademacher came into our Center to get a massage. She ended up giving us a copy of Paul’s book, *A Spiritual Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Universe*. The crazy part about her visit is that I had decided just that day that I needed to call the Institute to find someone to talk with about frequencies and music for the sound tables that we use in our massage practice. We had known about Monroe for many years but never had connected.”

The Center now holds twice-weekly local group meetings in its yoga room, and Don estimates that one hundred people have attended the meetings in the last nine months. In October 2010, the Center hosted an *EXCURSION* workshop taught by Paul and Jacquie Rademacher, and the Murphys plan to go through the TMI Facilitator Training Program (FTP) so they can present *EXCURSION* workshops at the Center on a regular basis.

Scott Desgrosselliers attended the *GATEWAY VOYAGE* in 2009 and, like many before him, was galvanized by his experience. He went through all the Wave CDs and then decided to become an *OUTREACH* facilitator. When he heard about the Local Chapter Network, he called TMI and got a contact list for Chicago-area graduates. Millie Hzerany—another TMI grad from Chicago who had attended the first LCN retreat—helped, and the Chicago group had its first meeting in March 2010.

“We meet at the public library every four to six weeks,” says Desgrosselliers, “and people have come to count on [the meetings].” Desgrosselliers is excited about the future of his group, and he wants to promote the group more in the coming year, reaching even more like-minded people. “I never felt the need to find a ‘tribe’ before, but it’s cool to know that there are people out there who aren’t satisfied with the status quo, who are trying to explore how things really are.”

The LCN “tribe” is spreading around the world with each passing day. Prior to the first retreat, there were ten known local groups. Currently, there are fifty-seven active local groups in the United States, and there are seventeen groups in countries across the globe, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, the Netherlands, Romania, Russia, and Spain.

“We receive anywhere from three to ten queries from around the world each week,” states Evans. “Most people are looking for a safe, comfortable place to talk about their beliefs or to share their experiences. Although the primary goal is to help people start chapters in their own communities, we are just as committed to helping people connect with each other whether a formal structure is created or not.”

Beth Vaughan, currently the LCN regional coordinator for both the Southwest and the Midwest regions, estimates that since the first LCN retreat, approximately two hundred inquiries have come in requesting information on local groups.

“The people who are contacting us through the Web site have read Robert Monroe’s books or have an interest in the Institute and want to be around like-minded people. They seem to be very eager to connect in their local communities. Many have never been to a program and want to gain more information about TMI. From a regional coordinator’s point of view, it is exciting to be part of the LCN, helping people who have similar interests come together. The growing number of people contacting the LCN indicates that there is definitely a need for support at the local level.”

The need for support is especially important for graduates who are a world away from Faber, Virginia. Gwen Jones and Irene Blanck, both natives of Australia, met at TMI during the *EXPLORATION ESSENCE* program in May 2008. When they returned to their home country, they worked hard to connect Australian TMI graduates throughout the country.

“We held our first meeting on the Gold Coast and had eight attend,” says Blanck, who is also an *OUTREACH* facilitator. “All who attended were very happy to be able to connect with TMI people again and to be able to speak freely with friends who would understand what they were going through.”

Intent on bringing TMI programs to Australia, Jones and Blanck formed a partnership and worked for months on the details involved in such an undertaking. Once they were satisfied, they presented their model to the Institute for approval, and in March 2011, TMI Vice President and Director of Programs Carol Sabick will travel to Australia to lead the first *GATEWAY VOYAGE* program there in Byron Bay, New South Wales.

Not long before his transition, Robert Monroe urged his colleagues at TMI to “get it out there,” and the Local Chapter Network is proving to be an integral part of the effort to spread the word about the work of The Monroe Institute. In addition to the GATEWAY VOYAGE next spring in Australia, regional events are being organized by other local groups to serve their larger communities and fulfill the Institute’s vision: “The Global Awakening of Humanity.”

The Chicago group is discussing the possibility of cohosting a visit to the area by Tom Campbell in May 2011, and the Naples Local Chapter is currently planning a 2011 follow-up to its February 2010 “Opening the Heart” regional conference/ experiential workshop. Organized by Southeastern Regional Coordinator Jerry Eddleman, the 2010 weekend featured TMI staff members Paul Rademacher and Franceen King and drew attendees from as far away as Germany.

Laura Davis continues in her belief that the Local Chapter Network will play a vital role in the growth of global consciousness. She says. “As I look back at our work over the last two years, I am simply amazed and inspired by the shared vision of all the participating [LCN volunteers]. I remember a pivotal moment during our first retreat when Paul asked us to move five years into the future to see what a global network of chapters might look like.” The participants then did a Focus 15 exercise and gathered afterward to share their visions. “As I listened to these visions unfolding, I knew in every cell of my being that TMI’s Local Chapter Network would play an instrumental role in the future of our planet.”

Evans echoes Davis’s view. “What a joy it has been to chair this worldwide effort,” she enthuses. “Together, the LCN volunteers are building what we envision as a sustainable community for TMI graduates and supporters.”

At the close of the second LCN retreat in March 2010, the following quote by Marianne Williamson was shared with the group, and many felt that it resonated strongly with the mission of the Local Chapter Network:

“We are at a place where few of us can move forward without the help of another. . . . Now we must conceive new life from deep inside ourselves. For that to occur, we must be in relationship. To co-create life, we need each other. . . . The miracle of love draws us to each other. . . . We will become, in each other’s arms . . . a new humanity. We will conceive something new. We will grow wings of divine compassion and intelligence, and the entire world will change” [from *The Gift of Change: Spiritual Guidance for Living Your Best Life*].

The Local Chapter Network has been conceived with a similar purpose in mind, creating relationships that span the globe and have the potential to change the face of consciousness worldwide.

As Evans said recently when asked to share her thoughts about the LCN, “What is it that we do? We help connect people.” In that single aim is the beginning of a whole new world.

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